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### 'Ubusing' Culture

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2009

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Dubbelboer, M. (2009). 'Ubusing' Culture: Alfred Jarry's Subversive Poetics in the Almanachs du Père Ubu. s.n.

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# Foreword

When I was sixteen a fire destroyed the public library in Emmen. Emmen is a town in the North-East of the Netherlands with a surprisingly large population of exotic animals. I should add that most of those animals live in the town's zoo. That is with the exception of two monkeys who managed to escape several years ago and are now believed to be living a quiet life in the suburbs. Anyway, back to the library fire. It was a tragic event, especially since the library was, together with the zoo, one of the town's only two places where I would willingly spend an entire day. However, as the cliché goes, something positive came out of this disastrous event, namely this dissertation.

'Hang on', I hear you thinking, 'what does all this have to do with this thesis? I want to get to the part where she thanks me.' Patience, just wait a few more sentences and all will become clear. Well, all, except for the part about the monkeys. That was completely irrelevant.

In the aftermath of the fire, the library staff organized a sale of the books they had managed to save, but were too damaged to be borrowed again. Of course, being a book-loving but financially challenged teenager, I was keen to help raise cash to rebuild the library, in other words to get great books for as little money possible. I ended up buying only one book for one guilders fifty, about 50 Euro cents. It was the Dutch translation of a French novel entitled *Superman*, written by someone named Alfred Jarry back in 1902. There you go, there is the missing link. And no, I am not talking about monkeys again. Since the description and the picture of a young, bohemian Jarry with long hair appealed to my inner grunge, Kurt Cobain-like self (don't judge me I was only sixteen), I felt irresistibly drawn to it. I read the book and thought it was one of the most bizarre and funniest things I had ever come across. Little did I know then that I would go on to study French literature, for I still had dreams of joining a punk rock band. So when years later I was looking for a subject for my master thesis, I remembered that odd little book. And when, yet another few years later, the opportunity of a PhD position presented itself, I happily dived into Jarry's work again. Besides in French Studies, studying Jarry is probably the closest you can get to being in a punk rock band anyway. You see, it all comes full circle.

Of course, this thesis did cost a little more than just 50 Euro cents and a library. It took several psychological and physical hurdles to get to this stage, including the typical symptoms of the PhD student: doubt, insecurity, frustration and repetitive strain injury. But the upside was a huge amount of freedom and actually getting paid for something I loved doing. Obviously, it would be in really bad taste to thank whatever or whoever caused the fire at the library all those years ago. So instead I will thank the people who helped make this dissertation possible.

First I would like to thank my supervisors Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Els Jongeneel. Sometimes it took five minutes, sometimes an hour, sometimes a whole year to get me back on track, but without your valuable comments and insights this book would never have seen the light of day.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen, the ICOG and the Graduate School for facilitating this research both financially and practically. Part of the research for this dissertation was done in Paris and was made possible by a grant from the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO). This book also owes a lot to the people and resources of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Librairie Municipale de Laval, and to the knowledge and publications of the Collège de 'Pataphysique and the Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry. A special mention goes out to Henri Béhar and Jean-Paul Morel. Your knowledge of Jarry and our collective commentary of the first Almanac proved extremely useful in the last stages. I would also like to thank Patrick Besnier, Ralf Grüttemeijer and Hub Hermans for having the patience to read through my text. In addition, I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has ever read my work and given valuable feedback throughout the years.

I thank my fellow PhD's, especially Joke Corporaal, Femke Hemelaar and Stefan Couperus. Academic discussions are great, but not without the necessary amount of coffee, alcohol, pasta and talking nonsense. Thanks to Wokje Abrahamse and Geertje Schuitema for becoming my back-up colleagues over the years and Matthijs Dicke-Ogenia who helped design the cover. Irene Nannenbergh, thank you for accompanying me to the door of my interview dressed in your 'bear suit' back in the 'Summer of 2003'. Chris Dickenson, you deserve a special mention as my roommate and co-director of our Alice in Wonderland Museum. Without your friendship my years as a PhD would have been a lot lonelier, less musical and a lot more serious. Marte van Dijk, you know me longer than I care to remember. Thanks for being there when I need it and for your down to earth honesty even when I do not need it. Judith de Groot, thank you for keeping me (relatively) sane and for being one of the few people who is never fooled by my superhero exterior. Bonny and Harry Dubbelboer, you have always given me unconditional support and you gave me some pocket money at sixteen. Without that I would have not been able to buy Jarry's book in the first place.

Now that I have mentioned Jarry again, I would like to add one last thing. Considering the fact that Jarry's self invented but universally recognized science of pataphysics focuses on studying the exceptional and the coincidental, it is utterly logical that a coincidental event triggered this study. Since Jarry did not shy away from grand gestures, I think he would have appreciated the fact that an entire library needed to be destroyed in order for me to write this book about him.

Marieke Dubbelboer